

Education: The Great Equalizer

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Education, commonly regarded as the “great equalizer” empowers people to overcome disadvantages and achieve their full potential. While most children have access to higher education, not all are as fortunate. Research from Columbia University estimates that more than 12 million children in the U.S. are living in poverty and are not able to access quality education or resources. These children, being deprived of opportunity, are not able to reach their full potential. Thankfully, we have an opportunity to change that.

Even though the public resources for education may be limited in some areas, the spirit of volunteers knows no limits. Many communities are blessed with kind-hearted volunteers who are willing to share their time and expertise for the right cause. North South Foundation (NSF) is one such volunteer driven organization with a mission to “Help people achieve success...by giving hope to those who may have none”. With 90+ chapters in the US, focus on “encouraging excellence in education”, dedicated team of highly educated volunteers and track record of implementing effective academic programs, NSF is ideally positioned to make a difference in the lives of disadvantaged children. The proposal below explains how NSF can develop a platform to match specific educational needs with available volunteer expertise. The platform, named “NSF-Educate” can be accessed by both the schools and volunteers using a smartphone App or online portal.

Since the specific needs of each school and child are both unique and dynamic, a one size fits all solution will not be the most efficient. Instead, through a volunteer-based NSF-Educate program that coordinates with local schools and libraries, children can get supplemental aid to

further progress their education. The NSF-Educate platform will allow schools and libraries to register themselves. Once registered, the app will ask the institution to enter their needs in relation to education. For example, some schools might need more supplies, while some might need more teachers. Volunteers will also register through the app by entering their educational credentials, areas of expertise, what they are able to offer (funding, teaching, supplies, etc.) and whether they wish to serve online, in-person, or both. Through the app, the schools will be able to place a request for volunteers. The app will then connect schools to volunteers who can cater to the needs of the school. This pairing will take into account the proximity of the school in relation to the volunteer, if they wish to serve in-person. Similar to the way a rideshare app works, volunteers will see local opportunities and be able to choose which one best aligns with the time and commitment they want to devote to the cause. In-person volunteers can visit schools in underserved areas and teach classes or workshops in subjects that have a shortage of qualified teachers or syllabus. Online volunteers can create and send educational videos and establish online communication with the school they choose to serve. Through volunteer efforts, the cost of managing employees remains low to none. Money thus saved can be used for funding materials and supplies to schools, as well as libraries in underserved areas.

The phrase, “ideas are cheap, execution is everything”, holds true for the NSF-Educate proposal as well. What makes the proposal executable is the skills and commitment of NSF volunteers. Making NSF-Educate a success will require support not only from the frontline volunteers who will participate in direct education but also the behind-the-scenes effort to develop algorithms, applications and portals. NSF volunteers hold advanced degrees in their respective fields and years of experience that will benefit the NSF-Educate platform. NSF can launch this effort as a strategic pilot for a specific scope of service in a limited number of chapters before wider

expansion.

It is crucial that we take steps towards improving education access in underserved areas to ensure that all children can fulfill their true potential. By establishing connections and networks between schools and volunteers, education becomes a community priority. In our technology-oriented world, an app would help connect people in need with those that can aid them. NSF-Educate will be the missing piece that will help us realize the unfulfilled promises of ‘No Child Left Behind’ and ‘Every Student Succeeds’ acts.

Sources

Huq, Sonia. “3.7 Million More Children in Poverty in Jan 2022 without Monthly Child Tax Credit.” *Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy*, Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy, 14 July 2022, <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/monthly-poverty-january-2022>.